Hazara Democratic Party elects office-bearers

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: The Hazara Democratic Party (HDP) has elected its new office-bearers on the second day of the party's two-day national congress, which concluded here on Sunday.

Abdul Khaliq Hazara and Ahmed Ali Kohzad were elected as chairman and secretary general, respectively, of the Hazara Democratic Party for the next term. According to the results, 153 votes were cast out of a 174-member electoral college. A total of 30 candidates contested for 21 seats.

According to the results, Abdul Khaliq Hazara, Ahmad Ali Kohzad, Qadir Ali Nael, Ismatullah Yari, Mirza Hussain Hazara, Muhammad Zaman Dehqanzada, Azizullah Hazara, Seema Batool, Mujtaba Zahid Advocate, Muhammad Raza Hazara, Abdul Ali Hazara, Muhammad Dawood Changezi, Ismail Changezi, Ghulam Ali Hazara, Muhammad Younis Changezi, Rehmat Ali, Ghulam Raza, Muhammad Hussain Turani, Muhammad Ali, Farida, and Ali Madad were elected as members of the central council.

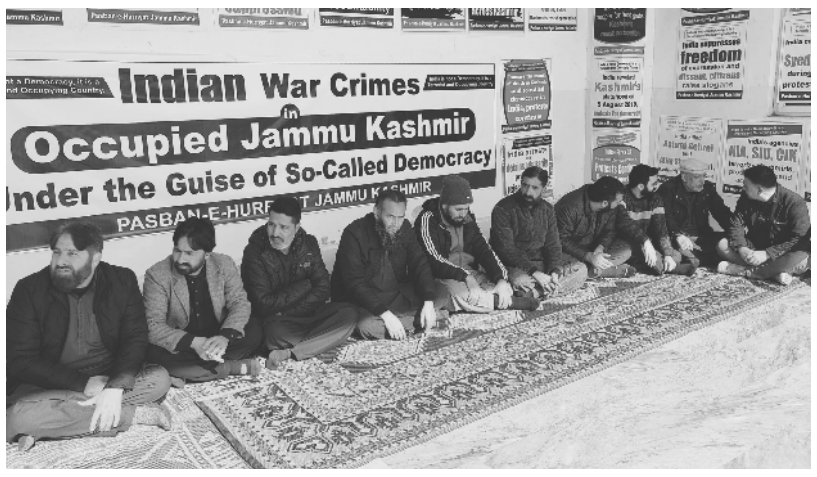
Following the announcement of the results, a meeting of the newly elected central council was held under the supervision of the election committee, in which the executive council was elected.

Abdul Khaliq Hazara was elected chairman, Azizullah Hazara first vice chairman, Mirza Hussain second vice chairman, Ahmad Ali Kohzad general secretary, and Muhammad Dawood Changezi organising secretary: all unopposed. Meanwhile, Ismatullah Yari was elected deputy secretary, Qadir Ali Nael information secretary, and Mujtaba Zahid Advocate finance secretary by a majority vote.

According to a party statement, delegations from various political parties participated as observers to review the elections. These included a delegation from the Balochistan National Party, led by central leader Ghulam Nabi Marri and Naseem Javed; a National Democratic Movement delegation led by Ahmad Jan; and a delegation from the Pashtunkhwa National Awami Party, comprising Faqir Khushhal Kasi and Naqeebullah. Delegations of elders and notables from the Hazara community also observed different stages of the electoral process.

Announcing the results, Election Committee Chairman Dr Taqi termed the continuation of the democratic process and the direct involvement of grassroots workers in leadership selection a major achievement of the HDP. He congratulated all successful candidates and expressed hope that the newly elected council would play an important role in promoting tolerance and fostering inter-community harmony among the communities residing in Quetta.

The party's central statement further said that the newly elected councils will take oath during a public gathering marking the death anniversary of the party's martyred chairman on January 26. Party workers, supporters, and members of all segments of society were urged to participate actively in the public meeting and oath-taking ceremony.



PHJK activists stage a sit-in at Muzaffarabad Press Club.—Photo by the writer

Activists slam Indian 'reign of terror' in held Kashmir

Kashmiri refugees stage sit-in, urge international community to intervene

By Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: Kashmiri activists staged a symbolic sit-in to condemn the unrelenting reign of terror in India-held Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, a day ahead of India's so-called Republic Day.

The demonstration, staged outside Muzaffarabad Press Club under the aegis of Pasban-i-Hurriyat Jammu Kashmir (PHJK) — an organisation of post-1989 Kashmiri refugees — was aimed at drawing attention to the Indian occupation machinery's brutal acts in the held territory and the enforcement of a slew of draconian laws.

Posters and banners depicting various forms of repression in occupied Jammu and Kashmir were displayed at the venue of the sit-in where participants raised slogans against India's sham democracy and the continued subjugation of Kashmiris.

Right to self-determination

They demanded their internationally recognised right to self-determination, and also called on the United Nations (UN) to intervene.

"Down with India's farcical democracy" and "UNO, wake up and come to our rescue" were among the slogans chanted.

Addressing the gathering, PHJK chairman Uzair Ahmed Ghazali said India's decision of August 5, 2019 had not only stripped Kashmiris of their political status but had also deprived them of their all human, social and democratic rights.

He said thousands of Kashmiris demanding the inalienable right to self-determination had been killed in extra-judicial actions, while youths continued to be targeted in staged encounters.

"While Muhammad Maqbool Butt and Muhammad Afzal Guru were sent to the gallows despite their innocence, several Hurriyat leaders died in custody due to systematic torture," he said.

'Serious war crimes'

"India is a terrorist state and its savage military apparatus is using black laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, Public Safety Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act with impunity to collectively punish Kashmiris," he added.

Mr Ghazali pointed out that sexual violence against women was being used as a weapon of war by Indian forces, resulting in thousands of widows and orphans, and added that mass graves were evidence of 'serious war crimes'.

Other speakers said demographic changes, land seizures, curbs on religious and cultural expression and a prolonged media blackout had turned occupied Kashmir into an open prison, where residents were living under curfews and security restrictions amid a heavy troop presence.

The organisers urged the UN and the international community to take notice of the situation in occupied Jammu and Kashmir, seek independent investigations into grave violations and facilitate the implementation of UN resolutions granting Kashmiris the right to self-determination.

Prominent among those who participated in the sit-in were Ghulam Mehdi Dar, Usman Ali Hashim, Faisal Farooq Sheikh, Iqbal Yaseen Awan, Muhammad Fayaz Khan, Khawaja Muhammad Sadiq, Muhammad Younis Mir, Muhammad Aslam Inqalabi, Muhammad Ashfaq Kashmiri, Imtiaz Khan and Syed Khalid Shah.

'Stray animals to be dealt with humanely'

By Muhammad Akbar Notezai

QUETTA: The Balochistan government has directed the Quetta Metropolitan Corporation (QMC) administration to refrain from killing stray animals, rather adopt internationally recognised TNVR (Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Release) methods.

In a statement posted on social media platform X, Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti said the solution to the issue of stray animals lies not in killing them but in adopting modern, scientific, and humane approaches.

Later, a safe and humane animal management process got under way in the provincial capital with the support of Panah, Quetta.

The chief minister urged the public to cooperate with the government's initiatives aimed at animal welfare.

He said the implementation of the animal protection policy was being made more effective and sustainable. "Balochistan is gradually becoming a safe province not only for humans but also for animals," he added.

Balochistan unrest linked to joblessness: JI

By Behram Baloch

GWADAR: Jamaat-i-Islami chief Hafiz Naeemur Rehman said on Sunday that military operations cannot resolve the deepening unrest in Balochistan, arguing instead that unemployment and a lack of education are the primary drivers of frustration among the province's youth.

Addressing a Bano Qabil ceremony organised by the Alkhidmat Foundation Pakistan, Mr Rehman said peace cannot be enforced through the barrel of a gun. He called for a strategy centred on ensuring jobs, education, and constitutional rights.

"When unemployment prevails and the Baloch people are denied their rights, anger against the state is a natural outcome," he said. "The problems cannot be solved at gunpoint; people must be given their due rights."

Mr Rehman spoke as thousands of boys and girls appeared for entry tests for free IT courses. He noted that nearly 50 per cent of school-age children in Balochistan are out of school and that while roughly 150,000 jobs are available in the province, nearly four million youth remain unemployed.

"When there is economic deprivation and people's loved ones go missing, how can the public be expected to fully abide by the law?" he asked.

FAO to hold national agriculture investment summit on Feb 3

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations will convene a National Agricultural Investment Summit in Islamabad on February 3 to showcase concrete investment opportunities in Pakistan's agriculture sector, particularly dairy and olive sectors.

The one-day summit, being organised in collaboration with the government, will showcase high-potential commodity specific investment opportunities, particularly in olive and dairy sectors. The FAO's initiative will facilitate dialogue between government counterparts, development partners, financial institutions, investors, agribusiness companies and farmers.

Building on the 'Hand-in-Hand' (HiH) initiative of FAO, the summit will serve as a matchmaking platform connecting producers, agribusinesses, startups, investors, commercial banks, and government institutions.

The Hand-in-Hand Initiative is a flagship, country-driven platform designed to accelerate agrifood systems transformation by mobilising targeted investments aligned with national priorities.

Under the HiH Initiative, the FAO supports the government in identifying high-potential commodities and strategic infrastructure investments that can enhance food security, build climate resilience, and reduce rural poverty.

The FAO says the investment conference will identify priority value-chain bottlenecks requiring public, private and blended solutions, and identify and analyse investment bottlenecks, including policy, regulatory, financing and infrastructure-related constraints, through expert panels and stakeholder dialogues.

The summit will help expand investor awareness and confidence in the country's agriculture sector.

The promotion of climate-smart and inclusive agri-business models by featuring scalable innovations from startups, smallholders, and agri-tech solutions aligned with sustainability goals, will also be discussed during the summit.

Pakistani lawmakers on US visa curbs

Continued from Page 1

was made to address concerns from US officials regarding recent lobbying activities on Capitol Hill linked to supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan.

Senator Hassan noted that the delegation's purpose was "constructive engagement, not politics".

Beyond immigration, the officials discussed economic cooperation and Pakistan's role in counter-terrorism and regional stability. Mr Mandviwalla argued that reliance on executive channels alone is insufficient for a robust partnership.

"Relations must also thrive at the parliamentary level," Mr Mandviwalla said. The delegation also discussed economic and development cooperation, emphasising that Pakistan seeks partnership with the United States not out of weakness but as a strategic choice. The delegation concluded that these meetings mark an important step in strengthening Pakistan-US ties at the legislative level, complementing government-to-government relations and ensuring that bilateral engagement is inclusive, constructive, and sustainable.

IBO leaves three terrorists dead

Continued from Page 1

any other terrorists found in the area.

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti expressed satisfaction over the successful IBO, lauding professionalism, and bravery of the personnel. He said that there was no place for anti-state elements seeking to spread unrest.

Under 'Azm-e-Istehkam' vision approved by the federal apex committee, terrorism sponsored by foreign elements would be completely eradicated, he said.

Saleem Shahid in Quetta and Behram Baloch in Gwadar contributed to this report

Man killed in Panjgur road accident

GWADAR: A motorcyclist was killed after being hit by a vehicle in Panjgur area on Sunday, police said.

They added that a fast-moving Zamyad vehicle, loaded with Iranian smuggled oil, collided with a motorcycle on CPEC Road, resulting in the death of the rider, identified as Sahib Dad.

The rescue team took custody of the body and shifted it to the hospital, where it was handed over to the heirs after the completion of necessary legal formalities.

Police are conducting further investigation into the incident.—Behram Baloch

Eight held as police crack down on highway robbers

By Ali Jan Mangi

DERA MURAD JAMALI: Police in Nasirabad and Kachhi districts carried out a joint operation on Sunday and detained eight suspected highway robbers involved in looting passenger buses and other vehicles along the Quetta-Sukkur highway and other areas of the districts.

Balochistan Inspector General of Police Muhammad Tahir had taken notice of the rise in highway robberies and vehicle snatching and directed the deputy inspector general of the Nasirabad range to take action in this regard.

Following intelligence reports, SSPs of Nasirabad and Kachhi launched raids with a heavy police contingent on several villages and suspected hideouts linked to the gang.

The armed suspects attempted to flee but at least eight were rounded up and taken into custody for interrogation, police said.

"The hideouts of the dacoits were destroyed and set on fire in the area," the Nasirabad SSP said, adding that the operation would continue to eliminate gangs and other criminal elements.

CEC overstays his welcome due to lack of succession plan

Continued from Page 1

election commissioner, which was later dropped after opposition from JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

He said Pildat had opposed the reappointment idea on the grounds that it could incentivise an incumbent to seek favour with the government of the day.

Mr Raja has faced sustained criticism from political parties and rights groups over the ECP's handling of electoral matters, particularly around the 2024 general elections. Critics have alleged that the commission's actions, decisions and administrative choices undermined confidence in the electoral process, while the ECP has maintained it acted in accordance with the law.

The controversy intensified after the ECP announced that general elections would not be held within the 90-day constitutional deadline following the dissolution of the National Assembly on Aug 9, 2023. More than a month later, the commission announced polls would be held in the last week of January 2024, but elections were eventually held on Feb 8, 2024.

Among issues raised by critics were delays in results, alleged discrepancies in election forms and the use of administrative officers, including assistant commissioners and deputy commissioners, as returning officers and district returning officers, roles traditionally assigned to the lower judiciary.

Talking to *Dawn*, PTI parliamentary leader in the Senate Barrister Syed Ali Zafar said that his party had documented alleged anomalies in polling data. He cited polling station No. 180 of NA-130 (Lahore), claiming that the number of polled votes exceeded the number of registered voters at the station.

"PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif was declared winner from the constituency. Documents show that Nawaz Sharif secured 1,266 out of 1,825 polled votes. The number of total votes polled for the provincial assembly at the same polling station was 972. The number of voters assigned to the polling station was 1,818," Mr Zafar said.

Mr Raja's critics allege that the denial of the party symbol was aimed not only at disadvantaging the PTI by confusing voters, but also at allowing PTI-backed "independents" to later join the ruling coalition without risking disqualification. They also claim the move was used to deprive the PTI of its share of reserved seats.

After the 2024 elections, Mr Raja and other members of the Election Commission decided against allocating reserved seats to PTI-backed independents in proportion to the general seats they had won, instead distributing them among the ruling coalition, a decision the PTI challenged in court.

Despite a majority judgement directing that the reserved seats be returned to the PTI under the principle of "complete justice", the ECP sought clarification and later filed a review petition, delaying implementation.

Critics say this provided the government time to pass an amendment to the Elections Act, 2017, aimed at nullifying the court ruling by barring PTI-backed independents from joining the party after the legally prescribed period.

Mr Raja's critics have also pointed to delays in holding local government elections in Punjab and Islamabad, alleging selective enforcement. The ECP has previously cited legal and administrative constraints in relation to local polls.

Federal funding for provincial health schemes ruled out

Continued from Page 1

the Ecnec "in light of the prime minister's directive for the continuity of the programme beyond 30-06-2025 till 30-06-2027 for all permanent resident families of AJK, GB and ICT under universal health coverage (UHC) scope".

Under an earlier decision of Ecnec of Aug 7, 2025, a special committee led by the planning minister to review the entire SSP since its inception in 2015 and way forward noted that the health programme had completed its life on June 30, 2025, after availing multiple revisions and time extensions. "Therefore, the programme should be shifted to the current budget," the committee said.

It also directed the Ministry of National Health Services to submit a Project Completion (PC-IV) report and propose a thin structure to sustain activities and provide indoor healthcare services and protection from catastrophic health expenditures for vulnerable populations. The committee said this limited scope was in line with the programme's original intent at the time of its launch.

The committee said that "provinces, AJK and GB should continue their own social health protection schemes for the vulnerable populations".

The committee opposed the inclusion of "provincial districts via SSP" due to the fact that health was a devolved subject, and "if we start in one province, then there will be demand from other provinces too. Therefore, the provinces should implement their social health protection programmes for the vulnerable populations through their own budgets".

It also cited the reduced Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), which it said was already overstretched and unable to meet even the most critical federal liabilities.

The committee, however, recommended that after conversion of the completed project to the recurrent budget, the health ministry should, with provinces, design a pilot project on an affordable basis through "claim co-payments" on the pattern of Punjab, and a roadmap towards a full-fledged Social Health Insurance (SHI) on a contributory basis should be looked into.

The original SSP was approved on Feb 7, 2018, under the Prime Minister's National Health Programme Phase-II at a cost of Rs34bn.

It aimed to cover the entire population living below the poverty line, based on a 32.5 Poverty Means Test (PMT) score or an income threshold of $2 per day, using the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) database, with provinces contributing the secondary-care premium for their beneficiary families.

The national project expanded in subsequent revisions and extensions. In August 2019, all provinces except Balochistan were excluded from contributing to the priority-care treatment premium, with the federal government citing the spirit of the 18th Amendment under which both the health mandate and budgets were devolved to provinces. The programme ended on June 30, 2025.

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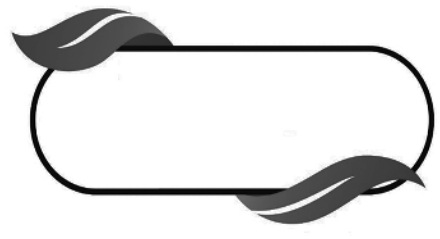

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